United Nations E/CN.6/2006/NGO/28

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
26 January 2006

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fiftieth session
27 February-10 March 2006
Item 3 (c) (i) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: enhanced participation of women in development: an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the fields of education, health and work

Statement submitted by International Women's Health Coalition, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* E/CN.6/2006/1.

06-22582 (E) 070206

Statement

The continued expansion of the HIV/AIDS pandemic reveals our failure to change the conditions that make all women and girls vulnerable to this disease. Every day 7000 women and girls become infected. They will require comprehensive information, treatment and care, including reproductive health care. Information and services are also needed by the majority of women who are not infected if they are to realize their right to remain so.

At this year's review of the progress toward implementation of the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (May 31 to June 2, 2006) the international community will review the successes and shortcomings of the past five years, and recommend action needed to reverse the pandemic.

We hope this session of the Commission on the Status of Women will send a strong message to the international community as they prepare for the HIV/AIDS review. Namely, that meeting the needs of girls and women must be at the center of a multi-sectoral response to the global pandemic, and will require their equal participation in decision-making. Both the Beijing Platform for Action and the ICPD Programme of Action serve as essential frameworks for action and include commitments to achieve these goals.

Sexual and reproductive rights are a pivotal neglected priority in HIV/AIDS policy, programming, and resource allocation. Failure to protect girls' and women's rights including their right to health and their right to live free of sexual coercion and violence fuels the pandemic. Universal access to sexual and reproductive health services and education, and protection of sexual and reproductive rights, are essential to ending it.

It is widely acknowledged that rates of HIV infection are increasing in women of every region in the world and that these rates are often higher for girls and women than for men. Women, especially young women and girls, are vulnerable because of denial and neglect of their rights, gender inequality, social, cultural and economic factors, pervasive violence, and biology.

Girls' and women's empowerment must be at the centre of a multi-sectoral response to the global pandemic. Regarding sexual and reproductive rights and health in particular, we call on HIV/AIDS decision makers at all levels to:

1. **Redefine "High Risk"**. Recognize that women, especially young women and girls, are at serious risk, and that all women have the right to have access to confidential VCT, treatment, care and support as part of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services.
2. **Expand Decision-making**. Ensure that women infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, and women's health and rights advocates, are full participants in decision making, especially at the highest levels, so that decisions reflect the realities and needs of women.
3. **Exercise Leadership**. Prioritize in words and concrete actions reducing the risk and the burden of HIV/AIDS for women and girls, through protection of their sexual and reproductive rights and health, including the promotion of policies and laws against discrimination and sexual violence.
4. **Invest HIV targeted funds**. Allocate and monitor the use of significant HIV/AIDS resources for health services and education that protect and empower women and girls, including:

- Comprehensive **sexual and reproductive health services** accessible to all women with capacity to deliver HIV/AIDS and other STI prevention, counseling, testing, care, and treatment (or referral) services.
- Universal access to **subsidized female condoms** as well as male condoms, and development and dissemination of **microbicides** and other women-initiated, prevention technologies.
- **Comprehensive sexuality education** that promotes sexual and reproductive rights, gender equality and skills development, as well as full and accurate information, for all children and youth in and out of school.

5. **Strengthen HIV/AIDS programs**: Protect all women's health and rights through HIV/AIDS programs:

- Ensure women's access to confidential, VCT, including support for the choice not to be tested; provide protection from violence, stigma, and discrimination that may result from disclosure of status;
- Ensure equitable, sustained access to treatment for AIDS and opportunistic infections for all women and girls, appropriate to their age, health and nutritional status, with full protection of their human rights including their sexual and reproductive rights; increase research on and development of appropriate treatment for various ages; and track access to treatment by age, sex, and continuity of care;
- Increase and utilize funds earmarked for care and support to reduce women's disproportionate burden of care;

The 2006 review of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS is a key opportunity for the international community to incorporate this action agenda for women and girls as we work to achieve the goal of universal access to prevention, treatment and care.

This statement is supported by the following non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council:[1] Center for Global Women's Leadership, Development Alternatives for Women in a New Era, Federation for Women and Family Planning, Girls' Power Initiative, Network Women in Development Europe, Swedish Association for Sexuality Education and Women for Women's Human Rights — New Ways.

[1] The statement is also endorsed by the following organizations: African Women's Development Fund, Choice for Youth and Sexuality, Foundation for Studies and Research on Women, Gestos, International Community of Women Living with AIDS, JOICP, Latin America and the Caribbean Women's Health Network, Mujer y Salud en Uruguay, Rutgers Nisso Groep and Thai Women and HIV/AIDS Task Force.